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Elliott, Howard

Address at the 41st annual dinner...Harvard Crimson

[Cambridge?]

[1914]

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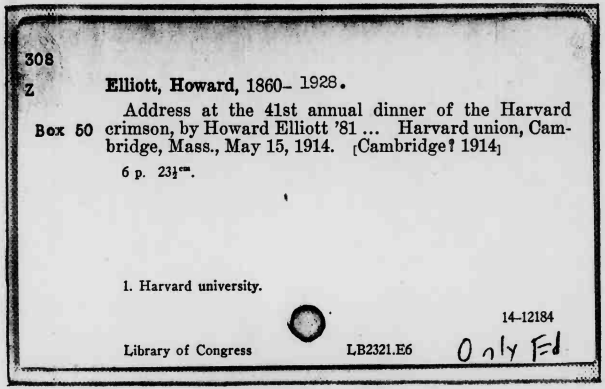

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Elliott, Howard, 1860– 1928.

Address at the 41st annual dinner of the Harvard crimson, by Howard Elliott '81 ... Harvard union, Cambridge, Mass., May 15, 1914. [Cambridge? 1914]

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ADDRESS

AT THE

41st Annual Dinner

of the

HARVARD CRIMSON

by

Howard Elliott '81

Chairman of the
NEW YORK NEW HAVEN & HARTFORD RAILROAD
COMPANY

HARVARD UNION
CAMBRIDGE, MASS
May 15, 1914

I am very glad indeed to have a chance to meet some of the undergraduates.

It is an inspiration to a graduate to come back to Cambridge and realize how much he owes to Harvard, to feel how much Harvard has done, understand how much Harvard is doing and believe how much Harvard can do for the country if the graduates and future graduates make the best of the training which Harvard is able to give. After you have been out of college for a number of years some here may look back and wish they had made better use of the advantages which Harvard offered. These are your golden days.

Some also may at times ask themselves why they spent four years at Cambridge. The best answer is that you may equip yourselves to do your part of the work of the world and particularly of the United States in future years. Some of you no doubt, are already looking out into the world and wondering what will come to you. A limited number may have your path fairly well mapped out, because of environment, or success on the part of forbears to which you may succeed if you do your duty.

Most of you, however, must go out into the world and fight your way and deal with the opportunities and conditions to confront you.

I have never been much of a believer of the "round peg in a square hole" theory. In a majority of cases, I believe if a man has in him elements of success he will succeed in one field of human endeavor quite as well as in another, although, of course, there are exceptions where a man has so marked a desire to be a lawyer, doctor, or an engineer, that he may fail in another pursuit. What you learn from books will be of great value not only for the knowledge imparted but the mental training will direct you when you are to deal with new conditions. What you learn of human nature by association with your fellows should also be of great value.

You and those who teach you have a great responsibility to the public, for upon you and those like you in other Universities will fall a large part of the burden of solving many of the problems pressing upon the country in these and future years. The indications are that the next fifty years in our Nation's life will be of all absorbing interest to all mankind.

In the last few years there has been very properly much talk about the conservation of our national resources. We must not waste them. Each one of you also owes a duty to himself and the country to conserve his own resources and live in such a way that mentally, morally and physically every power of body and mind is conserved so that you may do your share of the work of the world.

In going out into the world you may at times feel that opportunities to make a name or fortune are not what they were when your father or grandfather started. It is true that conditions are different now and there is not the same chance for the rapid accumulation of great fortunes there was when the natural resources of the country were undeveloped and free for bold, strong men to take. In spite of that, however, never were the opportunities greater than to-day for intelligent, level-headed and hard-working men of high character to work for the nation and themselves in an effort to manage the complicated machinery of government and business so that there will be a minimum of lost motion in our national growth.

This country has developed wonderfully since the Civil War. Great work has been done, requiring the exercise of much strength and carrying with it necessarily some waste and mistakes, yet on the whole the work has been well done and as a result the material comforts of the American people are greater than those of any other nation. During this struggle for development some lines of business, but not all, in fact, only a small proportion, have been conducted on lines not now considered right and fair. The unthinking man and the demagogue are magnifying past and present evils. By minimizing the good they are doing harm in an

effort to make people think all business and all government is corrupt and managed by crooked and unfair men.

Rasselas, talking with his sister, said:

> "Let us not imagine evils which we do not feel, nor injure life by misrepresentations. I cannot bear with querulous eloquence which threatens every city like that of Jerusalem, that makes famine attend on every flight of locusts and sends pestilence on the wings of every blast that issues from the South."

The training at Harvard should help you to tell right from wrong, to be accurate and temperate in statement and to exercise your influence for prudent, wise and just conduct in business and governmental affairs. The standards of business life are growing steadily better, notwithstanding assertions to the contrary; and the world needs more than ever men of training, of unswerving integrity and moral courage who will in their daily lives show that "Honesty is the best policy."

On July fifth next it will be thirty-four years since I shouldered a level rod in northwestern Missouri and began to earn my living at fifteen dollars a month and rather poor board! What I learned at Cambridge was of great help to me and I hoped then as many of you do now, that I would not have to work all my life and would have some leisure long before this, but the Fates ordered otherwise.

Two facts have impressed themselves upon my mind in my business experience and perhaps they will be of use to you. One is that prejudice causes a great many of the troubles that come to the individual and to government. If you can be so trained here that you look at facts and conditions without prejudice it will help you much and also the country. Conclusions which are often based upon half truths, prejudiced statements and lack of knowledge are frequently reached too hastily. In business, in law, in medicine and in governmental affairs a man must exhaust

his subject before he brings in his report, his diagnosis, and his conclusion. It must be based on a thorough study of all facts, and be fair and without prejudice.

Take the business that I am engaged in,—the Railroad. It is probably true that no boy or young man starts out with a hostile attitude towards the railroad, a piece of machinery absolutely necessary to the welfare of all the people. In fact, many boys are attracted by the railroad as a business, for it has power, interesting physical attributes, and it touches life at many points and there is some romance too. Later, however, prejudice begins to creep in and he thinks there are peculiar qualities about a railroad or a public service corporation that enable it to survive attacks and burdens and business methods which he would not assent to for an individual. All railroads and all railroad men, however, should not be condemned because some railroad men have done things not now considered right, either in law or public opinion. Every time a clergyman, a doctor, a politician or a cashier is punished for a misdemeanor we do not condemn the Church, the practice of medicine, the government or the banks, and yet there is a tendency to condemn all public service corporations and particularly railroads because of failure to manage some of them honestly and efficiently and through lack of information conclusions are reached which are more or less the result of prejudice.

Mr. Lincoln, on March twenty-first, 1864, replied to a committee from the Working Men's Association of New York City as follows:

> "No man living is more worthy to be trusted than those who toil up from poverty—none less inclined to take or touch aught which they have not honestly earned.
>
> "The most notable feature of a disturbance in your city last Summer was the hanging of some working people by other working people. It should never be so. The strongest bond of human sympathy, outside of the family relation, should be one uniting all working people, of all nations and tongues and kindreds.
>
> "Nor should this lead to a war upon property or the owners of property. Property is the fruit of labor, property is desirable, is a positive good to the world. That some should be rich shows that others may become rich, and hence, is just encouragement to industry and enterprise. Let not him who is houseless pull down the house of another, but let him labor diligently and build one for himself, thus by example assuring that his own shall be safe from violence when built."

Here is a good example from a great man of looking at all sides of a serious situation and speaking without prejudice. What he said fifty years ago should be considered calmly by the representatives of Labor and Capital at this time when adjusting the proper relations between them is one of the great problems of the day.

Another quality absolutely essential in these complicated modern times is that of patience. We forget, in the comforts and luxuries that surround us, the patient toil and accumulated effort that enable us to live as we do.

To give the population of the United States their three meals a day means that one hundred billion meals are served in a year, and the question of transportation enters into every one of those meals. The human mind cannot quite interpret these figures and the work can only be done through patience in developing the great occupations of agriculture, mining, manufacturing, transportation and allied pursuit and by insisting that the Government be fair and square to each and all. These hundred billion meals cannot be served unless there is the proper balance between all forces affecting these forms of industry. Without that balance you and I and the nation cannot advance as we should. In future years you and men like you must act

without prejudice and with patience in efforts to balance up the great industrial, moral and financial forces so that disturbance and misfortune will not come to this great country.

There is nothing mysterious about business, it is simply a question of hard, patient work, day in and day out, a close, careful analysis of every situation; development of the greatest care, economy, thrift and efficiency, and, more than all for ultimate and real success, fair dealing and the highest honesty.

You are among the favored young men of the land in having an opportunity to get an education in fine surroundings among good associates. You can make the best use of your great opportunity for yourselves and for your native land by conserving your resources, by avoiding prejudice and by learning patience to endure the work it will be your lot to undertake.

"Plant Patience in the Garden of thy Soul
The roots are bitter, but the fruits are sweet;
And when at last it stands a tree complete,
Beneath its tender shade, the burning heat
And burden of the day shall lose control.
Plant Patience in the Garden of thy Soul."

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